

# Chalet Fields of the Gower



by Stefan Szczelkun

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Photographs by Stefan  
Szczelkun

And an interview with  
Owen Short

ROUTINE ART Co. 2018



## Interview with Owen Short. August 2015

Owen: My father was an estate agent and he must have had some business in one of the chalet fields: I needed a new push-bike and he located one in a chalet somewhere: I accompanied him in the car to collect this lovely racing bike [it had a fixed wheel – which has recently become real trendy – but I was the only person I knew who had a fixed wheel bike]. I remember going into this slightly unusual area where all the houses were made of wood – as I would have described them then – and I was probably about ten.

Stefan: So that was in the Fifties?

Owen: Yes. My next recollection I have of them was... having moved to Mumbles just about the time of my thirteenth birthday, one of the

shacks and shanties all the way up on both sides. I particularly remember them because some of them were octagonal. Looking back, they were obviously prefabricated for export somewhere. I thought they were most interesting.

Not long after that my Father actually bought a chalet that was right in the heart of Mumbles just behind the rugby club where one of the steep hills goes up to come out at Thistleboon, which connects with Limeslade which is on the other side of the hill. In Mumbles Village there were a couple of little smatterings of chalets. He bought one, which was called 'Wood Edge'. It was number 22A Western Lane.

There were four or five chalets there, but there was no road access to them.

Western Lane was very, very steep and narrow - it has since become one way and restricted access.

There was a two-car parking space at the

site, because it was so difficult to do it any other way. (The C5 was assembled in Merthyr Tydfil) Eventually after my Dad died in 1985 my Mum decided to dispose of the plot. In the meantime, I'd got planning permission to build a new chalet on the plot.

Stefan: You'd also been away to The School of Architecture in Portsmouth....

Owen: Yes, I was there between 1964 and 1971. Michael, a current colleague, bought the plot off my Mum. I'd known him because we worked in an architect's office in Mumbles. He'd got a job as a kitchen designer and he was persuaded by his girlfriend's Father - who was one of the partners in the office I was working in - to start in the office then go to the school of architecture in Cardiff. He bought the plot and designed and built a modern version of a timber

build it as a timber frame which was easy to carry there in bits, rather than thousands of bricks and bags of cement. He had a builder friend that attended the same church as him and I think he built it all almost single-handedly in about six months. It was basically single-storey with a forty-five degree pitch roof, because it was supposed to a bungalow - but he sneaked some

galleries in at high level. It was built on eight or ten concrete bucket pads with a post coming off each one and then infilled with a timber frame. It was a lovely job.

Stefan: When did you next get involved with converting, repairing or changing chalets?

Owen: Probably after I bought the chalet on Hareslade, which I bought after I fell off my motorbike in 1990. In the office where I was working - where Michael was working when he



much in way of mains was quite an services, especially interesting exercise to drains, but it was just find out about these up from Three Cliffs things.

Bay, it's pretty sandy Rob's chalet is all soil... That's why it completely new.

was called Sandy When he bought it, it Lane! He was really was still the old chuffed because he original chalet with a sold it for £400! pitched roof. I think it

[Laughs] And now had lost its veranda they are going for but there were

£400,000 - partly vestiges of it on the because they have south front there. Very

mostly become poor condition, but freehold properties. like a lot of them they

Sandy Lane was, I extend at the back think, owned by one with a very shallow

of the local farms. almost flat roof. They There's about a go as far back as they

hundred or more can until it runs out of properties there I headroom. And it was

think. There would very much like that probably have been and in poor condition.

two hundred there in He made the front its heyday. I expect it part habitable and

was a nice little earner then we designed this for the farmer if he whole frame with a

was getting a tenner a central post. He built year from, perhaps, it in four quarters. So,

two hundred (plots) in he built a back quarter return for minimal first and then the

provision of facilities. second back quarter. The site was then

bought by a big was all habitable he development group. I renewed the front two

think it was BJC who quarters. All done was a big developer in without permission.

the area at the time. He built it as if he was The BJC Group – I 'repairing' bit by bit.

think – bought it But then when he hoping they could wanted to put the new

clear the chalets and roof on – it had a

rather than into a hall or a corridor. Rob hasn't got a 'front' door because one door goes into his kitchen and the patio doors go straight into the main living room. There's no formal entrance where people would come in.

Stefan: The structure is nothing like the typical shanty.



Owen: No. It's what<sup>4</sup> you would call an English timber frame. I'm not quite sure why English rather than British. Those properly cut joints and different housings - it was quite fun researching.

Stefan: He was a carpenter?

Owen: No, he just got on with it. He wasn't a carpenter. He was a botanist who became an acupuncturist and herbalist which he practiced for many years. He now just grows herbs for the Chinese herbal trade.

Stefan: Sandy Lane is one of the most





Sandy  
chalets...

Lane



Rob Ladds in his  
living room.





Inside Rob Ladd's  
chalet as described  
by Owen Short in  
the interview.





Rob enjoying his  
bedroom view









Some of the chalets  
have become fairly  
conventional  
dwellings.



Others retain a feel  
for their origins.











The Sandy Lane  
community  
noticeboard



This is one surviving example of a typical original chalet. The veranda has been glazed but it is<sup>18</sup> otherwise similar to what it might have been like when built in the Thirties.









This is the garden  
'shed' for the  
beautiful red chalet  
to the right.











In spite of its  
ramshackle  
appearance this  
chalet was still  
occupied.. 25



This one had a sea  
view.



















## Hareslade Chalet Field

Owen: In Hareslade chalet field the land is divided into two. The front field is held freehold by a company which consists of all the individual plot-holders in the front field who each become a 'director' of the company. So, it's allegedly a democratic system. There's some sort of committee that runs the company and grants a lease to each of the individual plot-holders, and then the field – which is still an open space – is shared for use equally. According to Matt [page 62] some of the more enlightened newcomers, rather than the entrenched old timers, tried to reach an agreement to have a common area where they can do some earthworks with a fire pit in the middle, a play area for kids and such things. But to date they haven't managed to achieve any

there were quite poor and some were crooks and the like. There are all sorts of people! A trust fund or something was set up so the people who couldn't afford to pay at the outset could pay into it and gradually reduce their debt, and eventually everybody would get paid back.

Stefan: When was the Chalet Field at Hareslade first started? Do you know the history of it? Because the Plotlands in England go back to the 1920's.

Owen: No, I don't know the date when it was started. I'm fairly certain that as people slowly got slightly more mobile and had more leisure they were building chalets as holiday homes. A lot of them had no tenure at all. You would rent the ground and build your shack and you had no long-term tenure on the land. There used to be a nominal pound a year annual licence, just to keep it legal, but that gradually

of them, as in perhaps bought a Hareslade, had couple together and become freehold knocked one down properties by that and so you were using time. And that's when a double or even a they actually wrote treble plot, you the planning couldn't revert to guidelines. The replacing the original Design Guide separate plots as they specifically covered became more Hareslade and Sandy valuable, which is Lane, and specified what people would various things such as have tried to do. The what could be built, Design Guide gave what happened where size limits and said a chalet had vanished they had to look like and other such<sup>34</sup> chalets. matters.

Stefan: What kinds of people who were  
Stefan: So, it was a people who were significant moment in living in Hareslade at the relation between that time. Were the self-builders and people living there the planning from the Thirties or authorities really. whenever it started?

Owen: That Design Owen: I don't know Guide is still SPG – anyone that old that is Special Planning still there. I was Guidance. More aware of Hareslade. I recently there is also a probably used to go Guide for , which has there to buy weed or been designated an of something in the outstanding natural . Eighties or before.

The Hareslade Design  
Guide [leafs through a Stefan: So, the place copy] says in its had people who lived report to committee an 'alternative' that they accepted that lifestyle.

they could no longer  
reasonably follow the Owen: They were policy of getting rid perhaps more of the chalets - which alternative then than

No, No! We don't want any publicity!" Neil was able to get Which is very his hands on this and I common in plotlands went to visit him there because anything that and he was doing a lot brings attention to of work on this chalet them could invite the and he'd stuck an unwanted attention of extra level in. You the authorities. were never allowed to

have a second storey.

Owen: Well it was a They had to be just complete mixture of single storey. Though some old established they couldn't stop families and some people putting Velux druggy types and windows in the roof some hippy types. and colonising the The chap I bought<sup>35</sup> attic space. But the mine from – not quite rear wing of this one sure why he moved had a spiral staircase out, perhaps it was in that went up to an too poor condition for illegal bedroom under him to carry on living the roof of the wing at in – he got a Housing the back. Neil had put Association flat. But a dormer window in, he was allegedly which couldn't be famous for his seen from anywhere consumption of public. But the various substances planners turned up and he was a night and told him to take it bird. But he was a down because it was mechanic. He would too overtly a second mend local peoples' storey.

cars. Somebody once I'd never really told me that they were fancied living in one going on a driving of the chalets holiday and he previously because, promised he would although my Dad had service their car bought one, it was before they went. The very much a hobby evening before they for him. His plot must went he still hadn't have been freehold done it so they came because, being an and asked him and he estate agent, he told



Tavern. I'll take you planning permission... there." So anyhow, I they were so far tracked down the removed from what owner and he said the Design Guide what he wanted for it said. I used some of and I bought it. these boring brick bungalows several

Stefan: So, it was times as examples in after buying the chalet applications I was on Hareslade that you doing to discredit the started doing work for old Design Guide people with chalets? because, although it was still current, I

Owen: Yes, I can't would point out that remember having what I was trying to done any beforehand do in a particular [apart from for my<sup>36</sup> project was more in father]. Obviously, I keeping with the had to design one for ethos of the old myself. People were chalets compared to beginning to talk what had been about sustainability approved so often.

and that sort of thing That particularly – probably started by applied to one, the yourself amongst first one you meet as others [Laughter]. you go into Hareslade And so, I actually – in the front field – designed it, about that had been rebuilt twenty years ago in a as a brick bungalow way that might have with Georgian style been considered as bow windows on the sustainable then. I front and a shallow don't think they'd pitch roof [See pp invented solar panels 49/50]. The owner that far back, they had been an old lady might have done. I who had been living got many there forever. I think commissions after she'd lived there in an that, not only in original wooden one Hareslade, but also in before the brick one. some of the other But the new owner chalet fields. Not has had the roof taken necessarily designing off and we put a new

traditional chalet, you typically have the veranda at the front with a glazed roof. You replace that roof with an extension of the first floor to make a balcony. It would still appear to be a single floor dwelling with a big roof. This is what I mean when I argue that this sort of rebuild is much more in keeping with the original chalets. The front field has a nice sea view especially if you can go up to that extra level ... [page 55]

He was tempted, but wasn't sure he wanted the hassle so in the end I said: "Well, let's put it in and if it gets refused, which it probably will, I'll put the appeal in and if you lose the appeal I won't charge you." I was convinced that it was a winning formula! So that's what happened. At first, we were refused planning permission. I then<sup>37</sup> appealed [to the Welsh Assembly Government Planning Inspectorate] and we won on appeal. Although this hadn't been built yet, the next-door chalet number 10 changed hands soon afterwards – it had been an old original one. The new owner, Pete, who bought that was known to me. His long-term girlfriend had actually been a student of architecture, but she wasn't confident enough to design it so I was asked to do that. risking refusals either.

And then I got a commission for another - plot 9 - on the front field where

Ironically, Pete was a bricklayer by trade, but he opted for a timber build. That



I've done quite a lot of  
alterations and  
extensions to various  
ones... too many to  
count!































The front and back  
gable ends of the  
same chalet are  
shown on this  
spread.







Two classic original chalets. A similar pattern is seen throughout the UK.



























This is the same chalet as shown on the left. Notice the extensions to the rear and into the loft<sup>60</sup> space.





Thanks to Matt, seen  
here, for permission  
to shoot the interior  
of his chalet.











The Hareslade  
community  
noticeboard







The map that Owen  
had supplied me to  
guide my  
photographic  
mission.



I came across this original structure being re-clad in Miles lane. It shows the minimal 3x2 inch framework the original plotland chalets are originally most commonly made from.

# Afterwords



This book is intended to convey the unique quality of plotland chalets as they morph and change with the times. It is this dynamic adaptation that proves to me their enduring value in the housing landscape.

Link to the full interview with the architect Owen Short. <http://stefan-szczelkun.blogspot.co.uk/2017/10/interview-with-owen-short-august-2015.html>

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The link to an album of all the Gower photographs. <https://www.flickr.com/gp/stefan-szczelkun/pa8f1X>

Links to the chapter on Clough Williams Ellis and the UK Plotlands in my book The Conspiracy of Good Taste. (free ebook and website) <http://www.stefan-szczelkun.org.uk/taste/CGTindex.html>  
<http://payhip.com/b/pCoZ>

The Flickr group has many more photos of the other plotlands in the UK. This was a widespread phenomena active all over the UK from the Twenties that was only repressed by the 1948 Planning Act. <https://flic.kr/g/j2fwL>

I first came across the plotland chalets in

